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ABSTRACT

This paper asserts that infant-toddler teachers, like preschool teachers, need to be cognizant of individual children's developmental levels, chronological ages, and general developmental stages, as well as infant-toddler theories and developmentally appropriate practice for infants and toddlers. In that spirit, the paper describes the purpose and general aspects of a developmentally appropriate infant-toddler curriculum. The paper then discusses the relationship between infant-toddler development theories (such as those of Erikson, Piaget, and Vygotsky) and infant-toddler curriculum planning. A list is then provided of general questions for caregivers to use as they create a curriculum plan. The paper's last section provides a reference list of suggested reading on infant-toddler theories, developmental stages, and activities. (Contains 11 references.) (EV)

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Getting Help from Erikson, Piaget, and Vygotsky:

Developing Infant-Toddler Curriculum

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Lack and Need for Infant-Toddler Curriculum Planning

Early childhood practitioners typically do not associate curriculum planning with infants and toddlers. A more likely response to curriculum planning is with preschool age groups. In fact, numerous curricula related books and curriculum models (e.g., High-Scope, Montessori, and the Project Approach) are available for preschool teachers (e.g., Cromwell, 2000; Goffin & Wilson, 2001; Herr, 2001; Jones & Nimmo, 1994; Katz, & Chard, 1989; Peterson, 1996; Schickedanz, Pergantis, Kanosky, Blaney, & Ottinger, 1997).

However curriculum planning is as or even more critical with infants and toddlers because the environment[1] infant-toddler caregiver provides affect the experience and the development of infants and toddlers. What children experience during early years has a major impact on children's development as evidenced by the neuroscientists' research on brain development during the early years, especially the first three years (Shore, 1997). Infants and toddlers learn about trust, world around them, and themselves during their first three years. According to Caring for Infants and Toddlers in Groups: Developmentally Appropriate Practice (1995) from ZERO TO THREE, a National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families, "Infants and toddlers thrive when they encounter challenges they can meet. Infants flourish when they are free to explore and when they feel that caring adults encourage and take pleasure in their emerging interests and skills. Children's sense of belonging and ability to understand their world grow when there is continuity between the home and child care setting (p. 7). That is, infants need security and permission to explore within a safe and stimulating environment while

[1] The term "environment" includes the physical attributes of the classroom and the social relationships that exist among children and/or adults in the classroom.

toddlers need an environment that allows for independent choice making, group play, and control at home and at the child care center. Thus, providing an optimal environment for infants and toddlers who are left under a teacher's care requires that teacher systematically assesses the needs of individual children and plan for these children's needs.

Infant toddler teachers, like preschool teachers, need to be cognizant of individual children's developmental levels, chronological ages, general developmental stages as well as infant/toddler theories, and developmentally appropriate practice for infants and toddlers. In that spirit, explanation of infant-toddler education and curriculum will be introduced first then the relationship between infant/toddler development theories and stages to infant-toddler curriculum planning will be presented. In the last section, reference list of further reading regarding infant toddler theories, developmental stages, and activities will be suggested.

Infant-Toddler Education

According to Gonzalez-Mena and Eyer (2001), infant toddler education is about problem solving where "babies and toddlers learn how to make things happen in their world" (p. 27). This perspective views children as the initiators and caregivers as the facilitators of children's learning and problem-solving. Even non-mobile infants are active participants and inquirers of their own world, rather than the passive receivers of the stereotypical thinking of infants where infants are fed, changed, and so on by the adults around them.

The caregivers or teachers of infants and toddlers, then, are not the initiators and sole caretakers. Caregivers, instead, are assistants and facilitators of infants and toddlers'

exploration of their world and learning process. Caregivers can assist in this problem-solving process by paying attention to individual infant and toddler's cues and by being actively present (i.e., being involved in a respectful, responsive, and reciprocal relationships with infants and toddlers). Thus, the relationship between a caregiver and her/his infants and toddlers is a bi-directional, mutual relationship where both parties are respected partners in the inquiry process.

Caregivers provide infants and toddlers with opportunities to establish positive relationships, form attachments, and problem solve within their daily caregiving routines (e.g., feeding and diapering times) and during free play. For example, a diaper changing time is an opportunity for problem solving where each step involved is verbalized to the infant or toddler and the caregiver's full attention is on that child and child's cues so that infant or toddler is learning about taking turns in conversation, his/her body parts, different sensations, cause/effect of his/her actions and for strengthening ties between child and the caregiver.

Infant-Toddler Curriculum: Plan for Learning

Infant-toddler curriculum, then, promotes learning in every developmental area, not just intellectual development, and in everything that happens throughout the day, utilizing sensorial input. An infant-toddler curriculum is not a preschool curriculum where activities for learning areas and circle times are selected and planned. However an infant-toddler curriculum, like a preschool curriculum, is a plan for problem solving and learning that is to be shared with children's families so children' s experience at home and at the center become continuous. An infant-toddler curriculum plan contains three

components: 1) content-goals and objectives, 2) process-adult's role, and the context-the learning environment (Domboro, Colker, & Dodge, 1997).

An infant-toddler curriculum plan that supports appropriate problem-solving environment for each infant and toddlers in the classroom consists of an individual child plan and group plan. The group plan will allow for modifications within the physical environment (i.e., activities and materials available for all children in the room). The caregiver can introduce new environment or experiences to the entire group of children through the group plan. For example, the caregiver can bring the Fall season into the classroom by having a path of laminated gold, red, and brown leaves on the floor. In addition, photographs of children's activities at home that are Fall season related and crops for harvesting (e.g., apples and pumpkins) can be brought into the room. This way, what children experience outside and at home during Fall season will be supplemented in children's experience at the child care center; providing a natural environment for problem solving opportunities for infants and toddlers.

An individual child plan consists of an activity and a specific goal or objective that is appropriate for that child's development or the next step in the continuum of developmental stages. The individual child plan is determined by children's developmental stage and infant toddler developmental theories.

Suppose a seven-months-old baby is one of the children in this classroom. According to Jean Piaget's sensorimotor period, a seven-months old baby is especially fascinated with manipulation of objects not associated with own body. Developmentally, a typical seven-months-old can 1) pick up objects using thumb and finger, 2) reach for objects, 3) transfer objects from hand to hand, and 4) manipulate objects with wrist

movements (Hawaii Early Learning Profile, 1997). A more accurate developmental level of this seven-months-old baby can be gained through observation and assessment of this child by the caregiver. The caregiver, then, can encourage baby's eye-hand coordination and manipulation of objects – *"content" part of the curriculum plan* - by providing (fall related) objects to the infant and bringing the object back when object falls out of baby's reach – *"process" part of the curriculum plan* - so this seven-months-old baby can continue to examine the object's properties or place the object within baby's reach so that the infant is motivated to reach for the object. This above individual plan allows for more practice opportunities for this seven-months-old infant's eye-hand coordination and manipulation of objects. Thus, the combination of individual child plan and the group plan assists caregivers' effort in meeting the need of individual children and the classroom as a group by facilitating individual child's problem solving process within the scenario of Fall season related environment.

Relationship to Theorists and Developmental Stages

The caregivers' selection of appropriate individual child plan and group plan is dependent on caregivers' understanding of infant toddler theories and developmental stages as well as continual assessment of individual children's development. For example, theories such as Erik Erikson's psychosocial stages of development, Jean Piaget's sensorimotor stage, and Lev Vygotsky's concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD) are useful for understanding infant toddler development and facilitating children's problem solving process. According to Erikson, infants and toddlers are concerned with establishing trust and autonomy during the first two stages of human development; and according to Piaget, infants and toddlers progress from refining

reflexes to problem solving mentally by age two. This knowledge of Erikson and Piaget's theories will result in caregivers providing environments that encourage attachment, security, exploration, practice, and problem solving opportunities. Thus, familiarity with the general infant/toddler developmental stages and theories will assist caregivers in planning objectives for individual children - *"the content" component* - and the selection of appropriate toys, activities, equipment, displays – *the "context" component of the infant-toddler curriculum.*

Familiarity of Vygotsky's concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD) can enhance caregivers' ability to facilitate children's problem solving process – *the "process" component for infant-toddler curriculum.* According to Vygotsky (1978), ZPD is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). Thus, caregivers can determine individual children's ZPD where experience is familiar enough and new enough to offer appropriate challenges and provide appropriate attention, feedback, and modeling in order for individual children to master the present developmental level or reach the next developmental level.

Below is a list of questions that may be helpful for caregivers as they create their infant-toddler curriculum plan:

Content: Objective

- What is this child's developmental level?
- What theoretical stage is this child at?
- What new developmental level skills and/or theoretical stage can this child work on?

Context: Caregiver's Role

- What can I, as the caregiver, do to enhance this child's problem-solving process of a new skill or existing skill/developmental level?

- What games or activities or interactions will facilitate this child's mastering a skill/developmental level or learning a new skill/developmental level?

Context: Environment

- What can be changed within the physical and social environment and in the playground so that individual child's objectives can be facilitated?

For More Information

Caregivers can gain further understanding of infant toddler developmental stages, theories of Erikson, Piaget, and Vygotsky, and curriculum ideas for infants and toddlers by accessing the following resources:

Allen, K. E., & Marotz, L. R. (1999). Developmental profiles: Pre-birth through Eight (3rd Ed.). Albany, NY: Delmar.

Bergen, D., Reid, R., & Torelli, L. (2000). Educating and caring for very young children: The infant/toddler curriculum. New York: Teachers College.

Berk, L. E., & Winsler, A. (1995). Scaffolding children's learning: Vygotsky and early childhood education. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Crain, W. (2000). Theories of development: Concepts and applications (4th Ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Fogel, A. (2001). Infancy: Infant, family, and society (4th Ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.

HELP Charts (Birth-3 years): Revised Hawaii Early Learning Profile (1994). Palo Alto, CA: VORT Corporation.

HELP ... at Home: Hawaii Early Learning Profile Activity Sheets for Parents (1998 Revision). Palo Alto, CA: VORT Corporation.

Herr, J., & Swim, T. (1999). Creative resources for infants and toddlers. Albany, NY: Delmar.

Miller, K. (1999). Simple steps: Developmental activities for infants, toddlers, and two-year-olds. Beltsville, MA: Gryphone House.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (1993). Infant Curriculum: Great Explorations (Video # 847). Washington, DC: Author.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (1991). Toddler Curriculum: Making Connections (Video # 848). Washington, DC: Author.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes (M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman, Eds. & Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Zero to Three, National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families. (1999). How I grow in your care from ZERO TO THREE: Young infants (Birth to 8 months). Arlington, VA: Author.

Zero to Three, National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families. (1999). How I grow in your care from ZERO TO THREE: Crawlers & walkers (8 months to 18 months). Arlington, VA: Author.

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Dombro, A. L., Colder, L. J., & Dodge, D. T. (1997). The creative curriculum for infants and toddlers. Washington, DC: Teaching Strategies, Inc.

Goffin, S. G., & Wilson, C. s. (2001). Curriculum models and early childhood education: Appraising the relationship (2nd Ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall.

Gonzalez-Mena, J., & Eyer, D. W. (2001). Infants, toddlers, and caregivers (5th Ed.). Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing.

Hawaii Early Learning Profile (1997). Help strands (158-B): Curriculum-based developmental assessment birth to three years. Palo Alto, CA: VORT Corporation.

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Katz, L. G., & Chard, S. C. (1989). Engaging children's minds: The project approach. CT: Ablex.

Petersen, E. A. (1996). A practical guide to early childhood planning, methods and materials: The what, why and how of lesson plans. Des Moines, IA: Allyn and Bacon.

Schickedanz, J. A., Pergantis, M. L., Kanosky, J., Blaney, A., & Ottinger, J. (1997). Curriculum in early childhood: A resource guide for preschool and kindergarten teachers. Des Moines, IA: Allyn and Bacon.

Shore, R. (1997). Rethinking the brain: New insights into early development. New York: Families and Work Institute.

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